



‘Namaste’ and ‘Shalom’ Find Friendly Ground at the Temple Menorah

‘Namaste’ and ‘Shalom’ jostled happily with each other at the Temple Menorah in Redondo Beach when Swami Ishwarananda visited to speak there at the behest of its Rabbi, Steven Silver. Welcomed to the Temple with poorna khumbham done by members of CM’s South Bay bala vihar, Swamiji proceeded to join in the Friday evening Shabbat.

As the beautiful voice of the cantor-soloist filled the large hall with liturgical music, the regular congregation sprinkled on this evening with guests in saris and kurtas, joined in the services reading along from the prayer book in transliterated Hebrew. The Rabbi then invited Swamiji up where he gave his Hindu visitor a copy of the holy Torah. And at the Jewish leader’s request he in turn handed the Rabbi, a copy of the book authored by him, ‘Silent Search.’

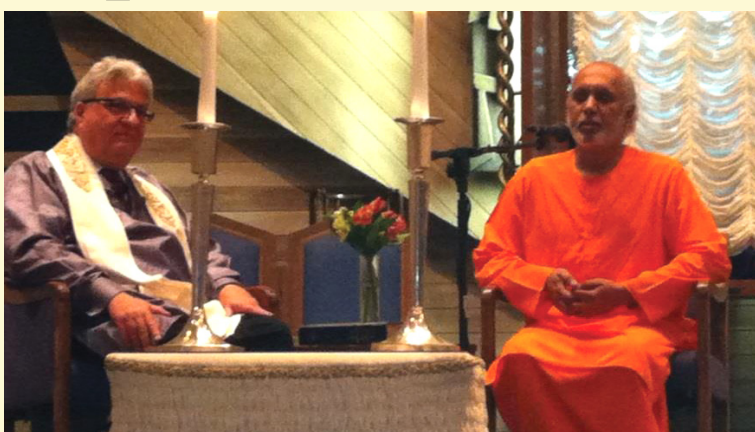
The two of them took questions from the audience. In response to a query on multiple gods, Swamiji pointed out that since god was all pervading, he can’t be restricted to have just one look! So we have the freedom to think of god the way we want enabling a personal relationship with Him.

Swamiji got to explain the symbolism of namaste. He also said that Sanatana Dharma understands that differences are created by the human mind. Religion teaches that love is the language of the soul. “So love for god is love for all, as god is in all,” he said pithily which was effective for the immediate understanding of the audience not previously exposed to Hindu thought.

The congregation then moved to the entrance of the dining hall for the prayer over the wine and challah (bread) after which Swamiji was asked to break and share in the bread before it was passed out to all.

The meal that followed was a reflection of the interfaith meeting. Dhoklas and chole shared space with falafel and other Mediterranean vegetarian dishes. Swamiji engaged in conversation with the Rabbi on youth, Jewish presence in India and CMLA.

An informal Q&A with the religious leaders followed in the banquet hall. On the ongoing debate of creation vs evolution, Swamiji detailed as simply as possible the idea of Sat-Chit-



Ananda, saying it was an expression of creation. When asked why he wore orange, Swamiji brought laughter when he quipped, “Because I am from Orange County!” He then went on to talk about the color of his garments representing fire and light. That light which banish darkness and ushers in god; and fire which was to burn away everything with the understanding that nothing that was now received was his own.

The Rabbi took questions from the Indians in the audience and reworked them to educate on Judaism. He talked of the Torah being a living thing, the connection of each Jewish temple with the holy one that was destroyed in ancient Jerusalem, what ‘reform’ Judaism meant and threw in a bit of current affairs wondering about tax payer money that was used for reconstruction elsewhere in the world.

Both spiritual teachers also agreed on the vegetarian food that was served and said ‘what we eat is what we are.’ Rabbi Silver praised India for its deep tolerance and openness to other faiths and both of them referred to Cochin, which was settled by followers of Judaism, several centuries ago.

The questions continued on, but in the interest of time, had to be brought to an end with the promise of the interaction continuing in the future.

Humboldt Students’ Experiential Camp at Krishnalaya

BY MARK

On Friday, April 5 afternoon we, we a group of students, migrated from Humboldt State down to a Chinmaya Vedanta Workshop in Piercy. Many of us expected meditation and a river walk, and we had been told of the legendary food and the more-than-expected quality of hospitality. Collectively, our knowledge of Hindu culture consisted only of stereotypes projected by the western world. Only one person had studied Hindu culture before. But after the weekend was done, many said they experienced life changing moments.

The first lecture by Swami Ishwarananda really stirred people’s minds up and the ones that followed kept it going. After lectures and when left to ourselves, we all contemplated our paths. He spoke about 4 paths- Work, Devotion, Meditation and Wisdom. A majority of us desire more than one path to be pursued equally.

The food only kept our minds happy and gave us energy, both of which were excellent thinking fuels! During the meditation session, Swami Ishwarananda asked us to write a prayer repeatedly for 5 minutes. For the record, people’s 3-4 word prayers were: *peace within me, I am stress free, well fed and happy, let there be love, God’s light surrounds me, let me see clearly, all beings be happy, permit us happiness* - and a handful of others along the same vein.



Nobody left without learning something. There were an equal number of us doing our seeking our way along the devotion, knowledge, and love paths. Unanimously it was agreed, each of us had gained insight and look forward to constructing our paths.

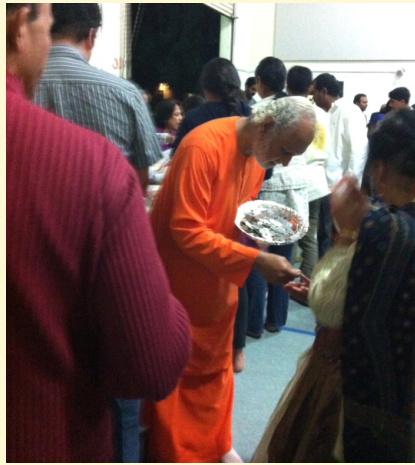
We were all very grateful to participate, and if we could change one thing, we’d make it a weeklong! We all learned something....something applicable to life. Thanks to everyone who made this happen including Lalit and Puppy Kapoor, and Maureen. It was memorable.

‘Birthday Boys’ Felicitated!

It was an evening that allowed CMLA members to express their gratitude and love for their acharyas....albeit with some fun thrown in. On April 27, over 200 people gathered to greet Swamiji on his birthday and Acharya Mahadevi on his milestone 70th.

After the opening, with bhajans including those in praise of the guru, speakers were invited to share their thoughts. Saroj Patel spoke with nostalgia about Swamiji and his early days in SoCal as a brahmachari when the first CMLA center Kasi was being set up in Anaheim. Vidya Kudwa brought out the tenacious dedication of Mahadevi in conducting classes. The final presenter P.Vaidyanathan had everyone sing along to his English verses set to the tune of Janma Dinam in praise of Mahadevi.

A fun segment included a question-answer session including a rapid fire round with the acharyas who were seated on stage. Both were warned by Nimmi Raghunathan and Hema Ravikumar that what would follow would be “respectful irreverence.” Sportingly, the two of them answered a variety of matters including those on volunteers, anger, their hopes, their preferences, etc. There was laughter, some audience participation and seriousness in the segment that everyone wished there



had been more time for.

The acharyas were invited to speak by emcee Susheel Mantha and while Mahadevi did a quick one expressing his gratefulness to all to so observe his birthday, Swamiji very unusually, spent a little while stating his emotions. He singled out each CMLA board member, several other keen and regular volunteers and touched many in the gathering with his words.

The event concluded with the cutting of a cake each by the ‘birthday boys’ followed by a catered dinner. Rekha Acharya had arranged for several who wanted to offer bhiksha to bring in an item to serve which they offered with love to their acharyas.

KEEP TUNED: PATRIKA WILL RUN THE FULL DIALOG WITH THE ACHARYAS IN THE SUMMER EDITION.

Parayan and Cultural Talent are Hallmarks of Ram Navami

The birth of Lord Rama was marked this year again with the exuberant participation of devotees at CMLA. The event began with the nav-din parayan of the Tulsi Ramayan on April 11. The chanting of the bhakti soaked verses of Sant Tulsidas, led by Swami Ishwarananda, began each morning at 9am and concluded at noon with the dedicated group sharing in prasad lunch.

The same group of CMLA members also conducted the puja on Ram Navami day which saw about 150 people attend and witness the worship of the Lord. People stood patiently in line to offer their namaskars in front of the deities of Ram Parivar and then headed out to gather for the dinner prasad.

Huge participation marked the culminating event of Ram Navami on April 20 - the cultural program. Enthusiastic participation by bala vihar children of all ages marked the program which began around 1:30 pm and wound down five hours later. Presentations ranged from folk to classical dances, from the devotional, light classical



to classical music and skits that entertained dialogs and costumes. Little ones shyly came on stage and stole hearts while the older ones dazzled with their talent.

Every participating child received prasad from Swamiji, who patiently sat through the program applauding and enjoying the what the CMLA children offered on stage.

Children also participated in art and essay competitions. In various age groups, children expressed themselves in words and color. *Patrika will run details in the next issue.*

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